

Dear Friends,

Every year, March is designated as National Women's History Month. Under the guidance of the National Women's History Project, the observance has become a major celebration and a launch pad for honoring women's history in schools, workplaces, and communities across our country.

The 2008 NWH month commemoration focuses on the arts. The theme is "Women's Arts: Women's Vision." NWH project officials say that this theme "provides an opportunity to discover and celebrate women's visual arts in several forms and mediums that help expand both male and female perceptions." The arts this year's honorees represent are as varied as the artists themselves. They remind us, as stated in the Presidential proclamation, that American women of every race, class, and ethnic background have made tremendous contributions to the growth and strength of our nation.

As the achievements of outstanding women are being praised across the country through special programs, lectures, conferences, and panel discussions, my thoughts turn to inspiring trailblazers from South Carolina.

Mary Gordon Ellis was the superintendent of schools in Jasper County who became the first female elected to the South Carolina General Assembly. Senator Ellis served two terms, providing representation on several key committees, including education, penitentiary, military, and charitable institutions. She also juggled the responsibilities of being a wife and the mother of three.

Six months after Ellis' election in 1928, another South Carolinian made history. Julia Mood Peterkin of Fort Motte won the Pulitzer Prize for literature.

More recently, South Carolina has had three women elected to statewide office. Nancy Stevenson served as Lieutenant Governor (1979 to 1983). Barbara Nielson served as State Superintendent of Education from 1991 to 1999, followed by Inez Tenenbaum who served for two terms. Locally, there are 24 female district superintendents and hundreds of outstanding women serving on school boards and leading schools as administrators.

Please join me this month and throughout the year in saluting the many outstanding women who are making a positive difference in the lives of our young people and in our state.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education